

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 /026 W

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P 061010 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3831

S E C R E T JIDDA 1846

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS

SECDEF (PRIORITY)

USCINCEUR, VAIHINGEN, GERMANY (PRIORITY)

CHUSMTM DHAHRAN (PRIORITY)

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI REQUEST FOR F-4 - DISCUSSION WITH SULTAN

REF: A) DHAHRAN 304; B) JIDDA 1791

SUMMARY: MODA PRINCE SULTAN ASKED AMBASSADOR MAY 5 FOR PROMPT USG AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO SAUDI PURCHASE OF F-4' S. (IF AGREEMENT FORTHCOMING, SULTAN HAS PLANS TO ELIMINATE LIGHTINGS AS RSAF SHIFTS TO F-4' S.)

SULTAN NOTED FRENCH HAVE BEEN URGING SAUDI PURCHASE OF MIRAGES AND WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RENEW SALES PRESSURES DURING KING' S VISIT TO FRANCE, BEGINNING MAY 14. BELIEVE THERE ARE NOW FURTHER GROUNDS FOR USG TO AGREE IN PRINCIPLE TO F-4 SALE. END SUMMARY.

1. IN MEETING MAY 5 PRINCE SULTAN TOLD AMBASSADOR AND CHUSMTM GENERAL SMITH HE VERY HOPEFUL USG WOULD BE ABLE GIVE EARLY FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO SAUDI REQUEST FOR F-4' S. SULTAN DESCRIBED HOW A VISITING FRENCH GENERAL HAD SPENT TWO HOURS WITH HIM SEVERAL DAYS AGO URGING HE CONSIDER PURCHASE OF MIRAGES. SULTAN SAID HE FULLY EXPECTED THAT DURING KING FAISAL' S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO FRANCE (BEGINNING

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MAY 14) FRENCH GOVT WOULD RENEW ITS PRESSURE TO CONVINCE SAUDIS THAT THEY SHOULD ACQUIRE FRENCH PLANES. IT WOULD BE MOST DESIRABLE FOR HIMSELF AND KING ENTER THESE DISCUSSIONS WITH KNOWLEDGE THAT US PREPARED MAKE F-4'S AVAILABLE. SULTAN CONSIDERS F-4 MOST DESIRABLE WEAPON FOR INCLUSION IN SAUDI AIR FORCE BOTH SYMBOLICALLY AND IN PRACTICAL MILITARY TERMS.

2. DESCRIBING DIFFICULTIES HE HAS HAD IN WORKING OUT A SATISFACTORY CONTRACT WITH THE BRITISH FOR CONTINUED OPERATION OF LIGHTING AIRCRAFT, SULTAN SAID HE HAD FINALLY PINNED UK REPS DOWN ON TERMS WHICH WOULD (A) ALLOW SAUDIS TO CANCEL WHOLE AFFAIR WITH PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR, BRITISH AIRCRAFT COMPANY, ON EIGHTY DAYS NOTICE, (B) GAVE HIM CERTAIN GUARANTEES BY UK GOVT THAT SAUDIS THOUGHT NECESSARY AND (C) WOULD PHASE OUT AIRWORKS, THE PRESENT CONTRACTOR, WITHIN ABOUT NINETY DAYS. (CONTRACT IS NOW APPROVED BY COUNCIL OF MINISTERS FOR SIGNING). 80-DAY TERMINATION NOTICE INCLUDED SPECIFICALLY TO PERMIT SAG TO SHIFT TO F-4'S AND ELIMINATE LIGHTINGS WHENEVER MOMENT SEEMED APPROPRIATE. HOWEVER, SULTAN REALIZED THAT TIME REQUIRED FOR DELIVERY, ELUCIDATION OF CONTRACT DETAILS, ETC., WOULD MAKE IT IMPRACTICAL TO CONSIDER PHASE - IN OF F-4'S IN ANYTHING UNDER TWO YEARS.

3. AMB REPLIED THAT UNLIKE SOME OTHER GOVTS US NOT SEEKING SIMPLY TO SELL AIRCRAFT. RATHER OUR OBJECTIVE WAS TO ASSESS CAREFULLY SAUDI ARABIA'S LONG RANGE AIR DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROVIDE SUGGESTIONS THAT WOULD BEST MEET ITS NEEDS. SUCH APPRAISAL WOULD NECESSARILY REQUIRE SOME TIME AND THOROUGH STUDY. SULTAN SAID HE REALIZED SOME DELAY WOULD BE INVOLVED IN PUTTING TOGETHER DETAILED OFFERS BUT MAIN THING WAS TO GET AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE AT ONCE FOR SAUDI PURCHASE OF F-4. HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE IT INTRODUCED EVENTUALLY ON SAME KIND OF CONTRACT AS NOW PREVAILED IN PEACE HAWK (F-4, GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT) PROGRAM. AMB SAID WE WOULD DO OUR BEST.

4. COMMENT: SULTAN'S DESIRE TO SET STAGE FOR REPLACEMENT OF LIGHTINGS WITH F-4 REFLECTS CLEAR MILITARY (AS WELL AS POLITICAL AND PRESTIGE) OBJECTIVES IN PRESSING FOR EARLY US DECISION.

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BELIEVE SULTAN'S OWN INTEREST IN ACQUIRING FRENCH AIRCRAFT IS MINIMAL. WE STRONGLY BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT FAISAL AND OTHER MEMBERS OF GOVT AND THAT HIS PERSUASIVENESS WITH LATTER WILL BE STRENGTHENED IF HE CAN CITE USG AS REGULAR DEPENDABLE SUPPLIER PREPARED ONCE MORE RESPOND PROMPTLY AND POSITIVELY TO SAUDI REQUESTS.

5. IT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE HIGHLY DESIRABLE AND HAVE EXTREMELY FAVORABLE IMPACT ON PRESENT STATE OF OUR RELATIONS IF WE COULD GIVE SULTAN THE DECISION IN PRINCIPLE HE SEEKS BEFORE HE DEPARTS FOR PARIS WITH KING FAISAL MAY 13. WE BELIEVE FRENCH WOULD THEN DEFINITELY BE OUT OF RUNNING AND THAT KING WOULD BE FULLY CONVINCED AS TO US DETERMINATION ASSIST SAUDI ARABIA MEET ALL ITS DEFENSE NEEDS.

6. GIVEN THIS NEW TACK OF SULTAN, WE BELIEVE THERE IS EVEN MORE GROUNDS THAN STATED IN REFTEL FOR US TO BE UNEQUIVOCAL IN A COMMITMENT (TO MAKE F-4 AVAILABLE TO SAUDI ARABIA) AND CORRESPONDINGLY SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE AIRCRAFT SHOULD BE AS SPECIFIC AND WELL REASONED AS MAY BE POSSIBLE AT THIS STAGE.
THACHER

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED TO ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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